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Full Comment

Rex Murphy: Scheer and Trudeau both continue their tiresome climate charades

Scheer, just like Justin Trudeau, had to show that he, too, has a plan to meet those sacred Paris commitments

Rex Murphy

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Conservative Leader Andrew Scheer outlines his climate-change platform in Chelsea, Que., on June 19, 2019. PHOTO BY ADRIAN WYLD/CP

"Daddy, what did you do in the Climate War?"

"Son, I carpooled twice a week, and (his voice breaks, a tear bleeds down his cheek) gave up stir sticks and plastic coffee lids."

Quoted from It was Hard: Tales from the Climate War (Patmos Publications, 2077).

It is a fiction and a delusion that Canada is in any way now or ever will be a significant influence, for good or ill, in the dreary, endless, pup-chasing-its-own-tail "fight against climate change."
Canada's leverage over the future climate of the entire planet is incidental and trivial. We are as a toothpick among redwoods. This is acknowledged. Were we to halt this country's entire energy output, the race to eco-apocalypse that the doom-mongers say we're on would not be slowed by a week. The coal mines of India and China would see to that.

It is a fiction and a delusion that Canada is in any way now or ever will be a significant influence

We are, of course, not contemplating anything like that. Instead the Liberal government has instituted a pot-holed energy tax which by the very most optimistic projections will hardly dent the nation's overall energy use. This it calls "fighting climate change." Canada as a whole contributes the most meagre fraction to the (putative) problem; the Liberal "plan" aims to decrease that meagre fraction by an even more meagre fraction. In the climate wars, Canadian politicians are spectators pretending to be contenders.

And what was the key element of the approval? That any profits from the just-re-approved Trans Mountain pipeline — should it ever get built — will be thrown to Liberal-picked "green projects." Projects with one aim: to end the oil industry which supplied the money for them. This week's announcement has the Liberal government promising to phase out the oil industry with the industry's own money. Economics meets assisted dying.

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As for Andrew Scheer's cloud of blather ("Canada, yes us, is going to 'invent' the world out of climate doom"), it was another tepid spasm of "I'm the reasonable one here." Instead of going to Fort McMurray, which is where energy policy should be announced if he wanted to show where his heart is, Scheer was in front of a picture-postcard calm lake under a beautiful blue sky — the kind of PR background you might find in a Greenpeace fundraising ad. It lacked only a swan with blue feathers and someone reciting Wordsworth.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is joined by Finance Minister Bill Morneau and Environment Minister Catherine McKenna as he announces the government has reapproved the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project, on June 18, 2019, on Parliament Hill.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is joined by Finance Minister Bill Morneau and Environment Minister Catherine McKenna as he announces the government has reapproved the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion project, on June 18, 2019, on Parliament Hill. PHOTO BY SEAN KILPATRICK/CP

Scheer, just like Justin Trudeau, had to show that he, too, has a plan to meet those sacred Paris commitments, and join the crusade against carbon dioxide wherever it takes him.

Both “plans” are trite. They address a global problem that Canada has not the least competence to fix. Both are pious and cowardly concessions to the mindset that not to be seen talking about or “taking steps to address climate change” would put them offside the politically sanctified posture of “concern” for the planet. They are meant only to appease: to appease the international green clerisy, the perpetually agitated world-savers of radical environmentalism, such nomads of anti-capitalism as Naomi Klein, and finally to stave off the fitful rants of California-based guitar-picking ecologists like Neil Young.
Not to genuflect to this band — and here’s the real killer — might create the impression that they are more concerned about laid-off workers, the Canadian economy, and in particular defending Alberta from the storm of antagonistic propaganda, homegrown and international, that has swirled over that province’s economic life-force for over a decade. Instead of the mewling “living up to our Paris commitments,” how

about a new slogan: “Restoring Alberta’s standing in the Confederation and bringing back jobs to citizens.”

Both 'plans' are trite … Both are pious and cowardly concessions

Neither, if they believe the rhetoric of climate change, has the stomach to say, if it’s the emergency we proclaim it is, let’s shut down half of our industries, ration car and air travel, put gasoline on a high-price ledge, and take the hit. The gap between declaring a “national climate emergency” and what this government is actually imposing as a response to it, is laughable. Ban plastic straws in A&W takeouts and underwrite cold storage for the Weston’s! Maybe trite doesn’t cover it.

As for the grand announcement itself — that approval was being granted for the TMX pipeline project — what exactly was that?
Four cabinet ministers and the prime minister for the announcement of an approval (was it the second or third?) of an extension to a pipeline, built in the 1950s, that has been sitting in regulatory remand for eight years? And has run through 17 court cases. And umpteen professional protests. And the departure of the company that ran it, owned it and wanted to build the damn extension, due to sheer frustration with the mess of Canadian green obstructionism, and government’s prostrate, supine response to that campaign.

A protester holds a photo of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a Vancouver protest against the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion on May 29, 2018.

A protester holds a photo of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during a Vancouver protest against the Trans Mountain pipeline expansion on May 29, 2018. PHOTO BY DARRYL DYCK/CP

All five powerful leaders sat there looking like they'd lost a favoured aunt to announce that – wow! — the Canadian government is approving an extension to — gasp! — a pipeline! Why, this is The Last Spike in our time. A nation-building moment if ever there was one. This is better than the Raptors. Or a climate emergency debate. Or plastic straws. If only Stompin' Tom was still with us so we could get a ballad out of this. Let us all stand and sing the anthem.

Here's the bottom line to this week's dual charade. Trudeau had to say yes — how sad this is — to one pipeline. And Scheer had to show that he knows where Paris is, and cares about global warming. It was a pre-election dance for the both of them. Assemble the panels. We have a lot of chattering to do.

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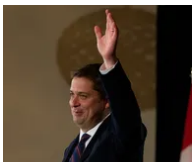

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